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Dayan-CIA story a 'hoax' to U.S., a 'plot' to Israel

By Jay Bushinsky
Daily News Foreign Service

TEL AVIV -- Was Moshe Dayan ever approached by the CIA as a possible contact man in Israel?

According to a supposedly "secret" letter sent from a Pentagon official to the U.S. Army attache here the answer is "yes."

But in the political storm that swirled up after disclosure of the purported document in an Israeli weekly magazine that specializes in political scandal, the affair has been labeled "a hoax" in Washington and "a plot" in Tel Aviv.

The question now is who, if anyone, would have been interested in forging a letter that would cast grave aspersions on Israel's politically influential minister of defense at this particular time.

THE ANSWER one gets from qualified sources close to Dayan here range from "the Russians" to "Yigal Allon" -- Israel's deputy prime minister and Dayan's arch-rival for the succession to Prime Minister Golda Meir.

The letter, dated May 27, 1959, was addressed to the "U.S. Army Attache, American Embassy, Tel Aviv, Israel," and signed "Charles J. Denholm, Colonel, GS, Chief Collection Division."

A facsimile of it first appeared in the weekly Haolam Hazeh, as part of a story by its editor, Uri Avneri. The editor, who doubles as a member in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, is one of Dayan's bitterest political enemies.

AVNERI gave no indication as to how the letter came into

his possession. He says he had been holding it for the past year, but refrained from publishing it pending a meeting with Dayan.

"Regretably," Avneri wrote, "Minister Dayan refused to see us and thus the matter could not be clarified."

Avneri said a "surprising development" prompted publication this week.

Israel's Atty. Gen. Meir Shamgar got wind of the letter and asked that Avneri and fellow members of his tiny leftwing political party show it to him, Avneri said, so he complied by showing it to his magazine's estimated 10,000 readers at the same time.

BUT WHAT is the story behind the story?

According to a British foreign correspondent, Robin Stafford of London's Daily Express, Avneri offered to sell the letter to him for publication in his newspaper several months ago. The asking price was \$2,880, according to Stafford.

Avneri denied this, but Stafford's version of what transpired, which appeared in Thursday's Express, says one of Avneri's reporters told him about the letter. Stafford says he then approached Avneri, but the Express turned down the chance to buy it.

Soon afterward, though, seeing Dayan at a local restaur-

ant, Stafford says he stepped past the defense minister's bodyguards and told Dayan of his talk with Avneri.

This may have prompted Dayan to ask the attorney general to start an investigation, whereupon Avneri was asked to produce the letter, according to Stafford.

THROUGHOUT the excitement over the letter U.S. Embassy officials here have maintained total silence. Dayan also stayed out of the picture.

But the English-language Jerusalem Post, whose political reporter sympathizes with

Dayan's views, noted that the same issue of Haolam Hazeh that ran the letter also carried a piece about Deputy Premier Allon's "heavy work schedule."

"Some political observers," the reporter wrote, "were speculating whether the timing of the publication had anything to do with the Haolam Hazeh link with Dayan's opponents in the Labor Party now that elections are set for next month."

It all may boil down to attempted character assassination at a time when the political stakes in Israel and in the Middle East as a whole are especially high.

MORI/CDF